



LIQUOR CHAINS DOMINATE MARKET IN SALES AND HARMS

27 May 2015: Your local liquor chain is capturing more than just the market for alcohol.

A new study exploring the established link between off-premise alcohol outlets and the rate of assaults and injuries in Australia has found that large bottleshops and liquor chains contribute most substantially to trauma risk.

In addition to looking at location density, this study is one of the first to examine liquor outlet characteristics in detail; with researchers assessing the price and volume of alcohol for sale and whether the store is independent or part of a chain.

Commissioned by the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE) the study, *Disaggregating relationships between off-premise alcohol outlets and trauma*, was led by Monash University and assessed 295 randomly selected takeaway liquor outlets in Melbourne.

Researchers studied trauma data supplied by Ambulance Victoria for intentional injuries like assaults, stabbing and shootings, as well as unintentional injuries such as a fall or being struck by an object.

The study found that the number of off-premise outlets is positively related to both intentional and unintentional injury.

Most interesting however, was that liquor chains appeared to contribute most substantially to trauma risk in neighbourhoods, with each additional chain outlet associated with a 35.3 per cent increase in intentional injuries and a 22 per cent increase in unintentional injuries.

Larger outlets and chains sold cheaper alcohol than independent stores, with the average price of the cheapest 750 ml bottle of wine being \$5.54. Outlets that sold cheaper alcohol were more likely to be located in disadvantaged areas.

Monash University lead researcher, Chris Morrison says the new study adds valuable insight into what we already know about the link between alcohol outlet density and subsequent harms.

“Previous studies have found a greater concentration of outlets licensed to sell alcohol is positively related to trauma in the nearby area. The more outlets there are, the more harm. What we didn’t know before we undertook this research was what bearing the characteristics of the outlet have on the resulting harms. From this analysis we see clearly that alcohol chains are contributing to more assaults and injuries than independent outlets,” Mr Morrison said.

FARE Chief Executive Michael Thorn says the study has important implications for licensing authorities.

“It’s frankly unacceptable for licensing authorities to approve applications without consideration to the existing liquor outlet landscape when we know that limiting the number of off-license liquor outlets, particularly chain outlets would reduce the level of harm. Currently, the default position is ‘Yes’ for new liquor licence approvals in many states and territories and it is left to local governments

and local communities to intervene if this isn't suitable for their neighbourhood. Licensing authorities should instead be prioritising public health and safety and placing the onus of proof squarely on the shoulders of the applicant to prove otherwise," Mr Thorn said.

This research has been released to coincide with FARE's submission to the Treasury in response to the Harper Competition Policy Review Final Report.

The Review Panel acknowledged the harms caused by alcohol and the need for reviews of legislation to take proper account of the public interest to minimise harm, however Mr Thorn says not all of the Report findings were favourable.

"The Competition Policy Final Report left the door open to expand the sale of alcohol in supermarkets, a move that would increase the availability of alcohol and lead to an increase in alcohol harms, and as such, it's vitally important that door is very firmly shut," Mr Thorn said.

With the current National Competition Policy responsible for the dramatic increase in number of licensed premises in Australia, Mr Thorn says it is important that the Government adopt the Review Panel's recommendation and build on this to prioritise harm minimisation in the new National Competition Policy.

"Alcohol is a harmful product and we know what happens when competition policy fails to acknowledge that. In Victoria alone, licensed premises have more than doubled since 1998 resulting in a dramatic increase in alcohol harms including a two-fold increase in alcohol-related ambulance attendances between 2003 and 2012. In the future, the Government must not only embrace the Review Panel's acknowledgement that the harms from alcohol justify regulation, but also ensure that minimising these harms is effectively referenced and reinforced in the final competition policy legislation," Mr Thorn said.

Michael Thorn (@MichaelTThorn) and Chris Morrison are available for interview.

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The **Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE)** is an independent, not-for-profit organisation working to stop the harm caused by alcohol. Alcohol harm in Australia is significant. Over 5,500 lives are lost every year and more than 157,000 people are hospitalised making alcohol one of our nation's greatest preventative health challenges.

For over a decade, FARE has been working with communities, governments, health professionals and police across the country to stop alcohol harms by supporting world-leading research, raising public awareness and advocating for changes to alcohol policy. In that time FARE has helped more than 750 communities and organisations, and backed over 1,400 projects around Australia.